

THE
FOUR
SEASONS
BY
CARL EWALD





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THE FOUR SEASONS





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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

The songs in this story have been translated into English verse by my friend Mr. Osman Edwards, who has successfully accomplished the difficult task of retaining not only the rhymes, but also the lilting rhythm of the originals.

A. T. DE M.

CHELSEA, 30 April, 1913.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
TRANSLATOR'S NOTE . . .	vii
PROLOGUE	xi
CHAPTER I	
THE FIRST MEETING . . .	1
CHAPTER II	
SPRING	25
CHAPTER III	
SUMMER	65
CHAPTER IV	
AUTUMN	101
CHAPTER V	
WINTER	141
CHAPTER VI	
THE SECOND MEETING . . .	169

PROLOGUE

PROLOGUE

Lo, nowadays the earth is white or green, according as Winter rules or Spring. The thrush sings in the grove and the canary in his cage, the smoke rises from the house-top and the church-bell tolls for evensong. The monk walks in the meadow and the poet writes verse.

But once things were different.

Once things were so that, had somebody taken a walk on the earth, nowhere would a dog have run out of a house and barked at him. For there was not upon all the earth a single dog

to run out of a house nor a single house for a dog to run out of.

He would not have come upon a tree nor a flower nor a blade of grass. Nor could he have found a drop of water to quench his thirst with.

For there was nobody on the earth—nobody and nothing.

Had there been anybody who wanted to take a walk, he simply could not have done so. For the earth was mere vapour and mist, so that he would have fallen plump through her and plunged straight into space, where the stars float.

And he would not have had much satisfaction from this.

For, unless he had been quite round and nice and bright, he would have cut a foolish figure among the stars.

Such was the state of things.

But the earth quite understood that she could not go on like this for ever. She could not have been intended to be never more than smoke. So she pulled herself together and did her best. But she had to go through a terrible amount and it was a hard time for her, which she never forgot and which she bears the marks of to this day.

She had to go through fire and through water too.

For thousands of years, she flew through space like a ball of

fire and, when at length she had a stone crust about her, the rain poured down upon her nor stopped until she sailed away like an enormous drop of water.

Meanwhile, the fire in the earth's interior broke out each moment through the crust, burst it and split it criss-crosswise and flung the pieces higgledy-piggledy to every side.

"My poor, dear little Earth!" said the sun and looked at her kindly.

"Why do you bother about that clot?" asked one of the big stars. "Shine on us, who are worth shining on."

"The earth is no clot to me," replied the sun. "She is my

child, like yourself and the others. And she is the youngest and therefore nearest to my heart. It is not so very many thousand years ago since she broke loose from me and sallied forth into the universe to tempt fortune single-handed. If only she behaves pluckily and does not lose heart, I shall have pleasure enough in her."

The earth heard this and held out.

Year by year, the stone crust grew thicker, the water sank gradually into the ground and the land rose to the surface. But, even when the crust became so thick that the fire could not break through it just when

and where it pleased, but had to make a regular effort when it wished to create a sensation, even then the earth's trials were not over.

There was no order about her at all.

For instance, it was just as warm in Greenland as in Italy. Plenty of plants grew on the earth, but they were queer ones: ferns and horse-tails as tall as the tallest trees in the forest nowadays. There were animals too, but they were strange and uncanny creatures which we never meet with now except in the old fairy-tales. There were quadrupeds that were thirty yards long and swam in

the water; and there were dragons that flew in the air and looked horrid.

And so it happened that it became ridiculously cold on the greatest part of the earth. Wherever one looked lay ice and snow; and the animals and plants died.

But then the fire broke out again, more violently than ever, and overturned hills and dales. Great new lands rose up out of the sea; and the sea swept its broad waves ruthlessly over the old lands.

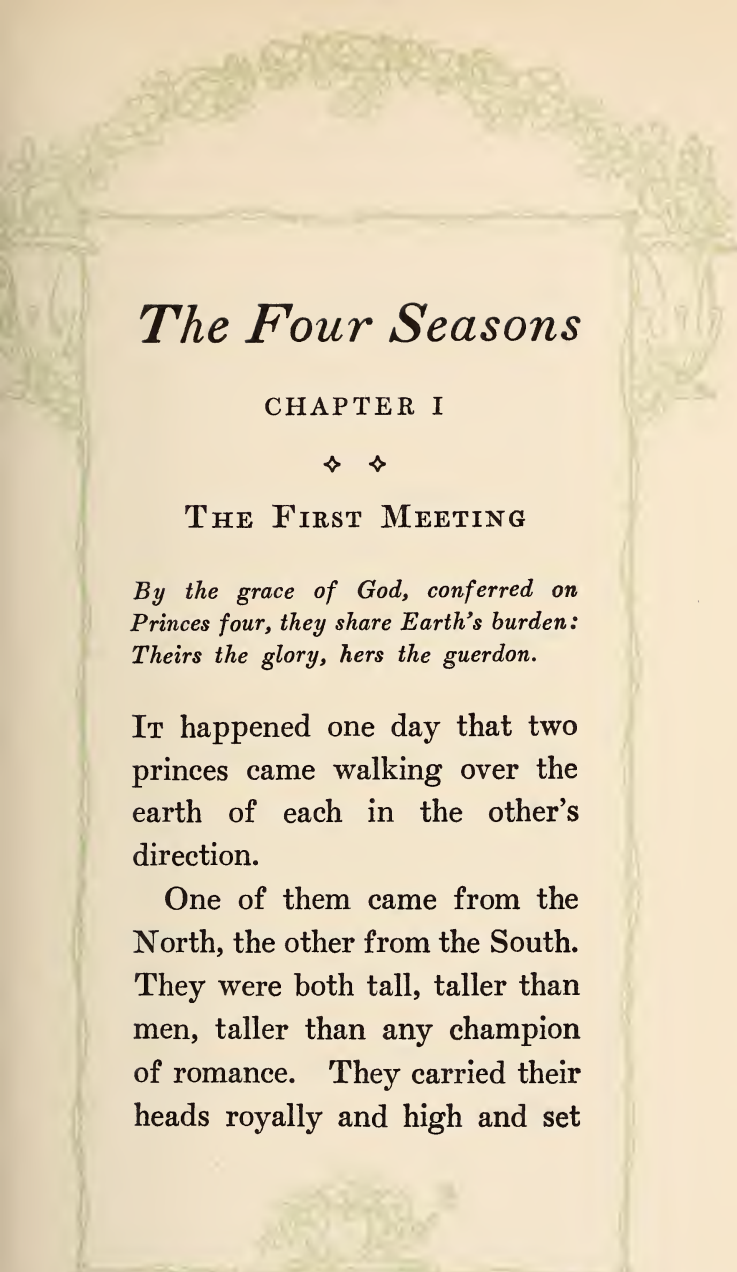
No one could conceive what the end would be.

“My poor, dear little Earth!” said the sun.

But how all these things were
put in order at last—this you
shall read in the fairy-tale of
The Four Seasons.



**THE
FIRST MEETING**



The Four Seasons

CHAPTER I




THE FIRST MEETING

*By the grace of God, conferred on
Princes four, they share Earth's burden:
Theirs the glory, hers the guerdon.*

It happened one day that two
princes came walking over the
earth of each in the other's
direction.

One of them came from the
North, the other from the South.
They were both tall, taller than
men, taller than any champion
of romance. They carried their
heads royally and high and set



their feet firmly upon the ground, as if it belonged to them.

The one who came from the North was the elder. He was an old man with a might of white hair and beard; his naked breast was shaggy, shaggy his legs and hands. He looked strong and wild, with cold, stern eyes.

The one who came from the South was young, but no less powerful than the other. His face and hands were burned by the sun, his eyes strong and gentle as the sun. Over his shoulder he wore a purple cloak, round his loins a golden girdle. In the girdle was a wonderful red rose.



When the princes saw each other from afar, they stopped for a moment and then walked quickly on again, as though they longed to meet. But, when they had come a little closer to each other, they both stood still once more. The young one shivered when he met the old one's glance; and the sweat sprang to the old one's brow when the young one looked at him.

They stood thus for a time. Then they sat down, each upon a mountain, and gazed at each other and waited for a while in silence.

The young one was the first to speak:



“You are Winter, I presume?” he asked.

The old one nodded:

“I am Winter, the lord of the earth,” he answered.

The young one laughed till the mountains rang:

“Are you really?” said he. “And I am Summer, the lord of the earth.”

They sat again for a while and measured each other with angry glances.

Then Winter said:

“I came out to meet you and talk to you. But I do not like you.”

“I came intending to talk you into your senses,” said Summer. “But I can hardly bear to look

at you, you are so grim and ugly."

"Shall we divide the earth between us?" asked Winter. "You come everywhere with your namby-pamby sunshine and melt my ice and plant your paltry flowers. I retaliate, as you know. I smother your creatures in snow and spoil your pleasure. We are both equally strong: shall we conclude a peace?"

"What would *that* lead to?" asked Summer, suspiciously.

"Each of us must keep to his own," replied Winter. "I have my ice-castle in the North, where you can never come, and you have your sun-palace down

in the South, where my sway does not reach. As we cannot bear the sight of each other, we had better lay a broad waste belt between our kingdoms."

"Nothing shall be waste," said Summer. "Everything shall be green, as far as I am concerned. I like to wander out of my summer-palace all over the earth and I will carry my light and my heat as far into your ice-fields as I can. I know no greater pleasure than to conjure forth a green spot in your snow . . . even though it be but for a day."

"You are conceited, because you are in luck's way for the moment," replied Winter. "But

you should remember that the times may change. I *was* the more powerful once and I may become so again. Do not forget that I am born of the eternal, unutterable cold of space.”

“And I am the child of the sun and was powerful before you,” said Summer, proudly.

Winter passed his fingers through his beard; and an avalanche came rushing down the mountain-side.

“Ugh!” said Summer and wrapped himself closer in his purple cloak.

“Would you like to see my might?” asked Winter.

He raised his arms in the air; and, then and there, the mount-

ain on which he sat was quite transformed. A wild, blustering storm roared over it; and the snow swept down from the sky. A brook which had been leaping gaily over the slope turned suddenly to ice; and the waterfall which sang and hummed over the precipice fell silent at once and its water froze into yard-long icicles. When it ceased snowing, the mountain was white from top to foot.

“Now it’s my turn,” said Summer.

He took the rose from his girdle and flung it on the mountain whereon he sat; and forthwith the loveliest roses shot up from the ground. They nodded

in the breeze from the point of every rock and filled the valleys with their fragrance and their colours. In every bush sat merry nightingales and sang; and from the flower-stalks heavy dew-drops hung and gleamed in the sun.

“Well?” said Summer.

Winter bent forward and stared hard at the loveliest rose of them all. Then the dew-drop that hung under the flower froze into an icicle. The bird that sat in its branches and sang fell stiff and frozen to the ground; and the rose itself withered and died.

“Well?” said Winter.

But Summer stood up and

looked with his gentle eyes at Winter's mountain, at the place where the snow lay deepest. And, on the spot at which he looked, the snow melted and from out the ground sprang the largest and loveliest Christmas rose that any one could hope to set eyes upon.

In this wise, the two princes could make no way against each other.

The day wore on; evening came and night. The moon shone upon the splendid snow-clad mountain, which gleamed and glittered like diamonds. Across from Summer's mountain sounded the nightingale's song; and the scent of the roses

filled all the fair space around.

The next morning, just as the sun was rising, two other princes came walking towards the place where Winter and Summer sat glaring at each other.

One of them came from the East, the other from the West. They were shorter in stature than Winter and Summer and not so strong nor yet so awful to look at. But they were big enough even then; and there was no mistaking that they were high lords and mighty men. For they walked the earth freely and proudly and looked around them as though they feared no one and nothing.

The one who came from the East was the younger, a mere stripling without a hair on his chin. His face was soft and round, his mouth was ever smiling and his eyes dreamy and moist. His long hair was bound with a ribbon, like a woman's. He was clad in green from top to toe. The ribbon round his hair was green, as were the bows to his shoes; and a lute was slung across his shoulder by a broad green ribbon of silk. The newcomer walked as gaily and lightly as though his feet did not touch the ground and, all the time, as he walked, he hummed a tune and plucked at the strings of his lute.

The one who came from the West was much older. His hair and beard were dashed with grey; and there were wrinkles on his forehead. But he was good to look at and he was arrayed in the most splendid attire of them all. His cloak gleamed red and brown and green and yellow; and, as he marched towards the sun, he spread it so that it shone in all its colours. He himself gazed contentedly right into the sun's radiance, as if he could never have enough of it. In his hand he carried a mighty horn.

Now, when these two had neared the others, they bowed low before them. The one who

came from the East bowed lowest before Summer; but the one who came from the West showed Winter the greatest deference.

Thereupon they sat down, just opposite each other, each on his mountain, and so they all four sat for a while, in a circle, and said nothing. Then Winter asked:

“Who may you two be?”

“I am Autumn,” said he who had come from the West.

“I am Spring,” said the other.

Winter looked hard at them and shook his head:

“I don’t know you,” he said.

“I have never heard your names,” said Summer.




“We have come to rule over the earth,” said Spring.

But now Winter grew angry in earnest. He wrapped his head in the most terrible snow-storm that had ever been seen in the land; and his voice sounded like thunder from out of the storm:

“Go away, back to whence you came! We do not know you and we have nothing to say to you. Summer and I are the princes of the earth; and we already are one prince too many. If more come, it will simply mean endless trouble.”

“We have not come to cause trouble, but to make peace,” said Autumn, gently.



“Between Winter and me no peace is possible,” said Summer.

“That is why we want to part you,” said Spring. “We two who have come to-day well know that we are not so powerful as you. We bow respectfully before you, because your might is greater, your sway more firmly established. We do not presume to encroach on your dominions. But we want to come between you and hinder you from laying waste the earth.”

“Yes, if you could do *that!*” said Summer.

“Yes, then there would be some sense in it,” growled Winter.

“We can,” said Autumn.

“We understand you both, because we have something of both of you in us. When you approach each other, one of us two will step in between; and the land where we are shall then be ours.”

“I will never let go my ice-castle in the North!” cried Winter.

“I will suffer no foreign prince in my sun-palace in the South!” cried Summer.

“No more you shall,” said Autumn. “None shall disturb you in the places where you reign in your might. But now listen to me. When you two move over the earth, Spring and I will always come between you

and soften the tracks of the one who is going and clear the way for the one who is coming. In this wise, we will reign for a while, each in his own time and each for a fourth part of the year. We will follow after one another in a circle which shall never be broken nor changed. And thus the poor earth will gain peace and order in her affairs."

When the Prince of Autumn had spoken, they were all silent for a while and looked out before them. Winter and Summer distrusted each other and neither of them would utter the first word. But Spring and Autumn half rose from their

seats and bowed before the two mighty ones:

"I will spread the cloth for Summer," said Spring.

"I will make Winter's bed," said Autumn.

"I will release earth and water from their icy fetters and prepare them for your glory, O beauteous Summer," said Spring.

"I shall bite your heel!" roared Winter.

"And I will make room for your storms and snows, O stern Winter," said Autumn. "But first I will bring Summer's produce home."

"I shall send my last sunbeams after you and give you lovely days," said Summer.

Again the four princes sat silent and gazed out over the earth.

And again evening came and night. The moon shone upon the snow-clad mountain, Summer's roses shed their scent, Spring hummed a tune and plucked at the strings of his lute, Autumn's motley cloak flapped in the wind.

The next morning, Winter rose and stood upon his mountain, all tall and mighty. The other princes did as he did.

"Let it be so then!" said Winter. "For a hundred thousand years it shall be so and no otherwise. When that time is past,

we shall meet here again and talk of how things have gone.”

Then the four princes bowed to one another and strode away across the earth.

SPRING

CHAPTER II



SPRING

*In azure now out of grey mist grew
My own sweet violet, shy and blue,
With eyes of smiling sunshine
And tears of diamond dew.*

THE Prince of Winter sat on the mountains and gazed upon the valley.

He knew that Spring must soon be here and anxiously looked out for him. But there was nothing to see but snow and snow and yet more snow; and he began to think that young Spring was afraid.

He laughed scornfully and sent his gales howling round the mountain-peaks. Wildly they rushed over the hills, snapped great trees in the wood and broke the ice on the river to pieces. They drove the floes before them, flung them over the meadows and whipped the water into foam.

“There, there!” said Winter.
“Softly, my children, softly!”

He bade them go down again; and, grumbling, they crept round behind the mountains.

When night came and the stars twinkled, Winter stared at the river with his cold eyes; and there and then there was ice again upon the water. But the

waves broke it into two at once.
They leapt and danced and
cracked the thin crust each time
that it formed over them.

“What’s this?” asked Winter,
in surprise.

At that moment, a soft song
sounded far down in the valley:

Play up! Play soon!

Keep time! Keep tune!

Ye wavelets, blue and tender!

Winter clutched his great
beard and leant forward to lis-
ten. Now the song sounded
again and louder:

Play up! Play soon!

Keep time! Keep tune!

Ye wavelets, blue and tender!

Keep tune! Keep time!

Burst ice and rime

In equinoctial splendour!

Up sprang Winter and stared, with his hand over his brows.

Down below in the valley stood the Prince of Spring, young and straight, in his green garb, with the lute slung over his shoulder. His long hair flowed in the wind, his face was soft and round, his mouth was ever smiling, his eyes were dreamy and moist.

"You come too soon!" shouted Winter.

But Spring bowed low and replied:

"I come by our appointment."

"You come too soon!" shouted Winter again. "I am not nearly done. I have a thousand bags full of snow and my gales

are just as strong and biting as they were in January."

"That is your affair, not mine," said Spring, calmly. "Your time is past now, and my sway is beginning. Withdraw in peace to your mountains."

Then Winter folded his strong, hairy hands and looked anxiously at Spring:

"Give me a short respite!" he said. "I implore you to grant me a little delay. Give me a month, a week; give me just three poor days."

Spring did not answer, but looked out over the valley, as though he had not heard, and loosened the green silk ribbon by which he carried his lute.

But the Prince of Winter stamped on the mountains till they shook and clenched his fists in mighty anger:

“Go back to whence you came,” he said, “or I shall turn my snows over you and bury you so deep that you will never find your way out of the valley. I shall let loose my storms till your wretched strains are drowned in their roaring. Your song shall freeze in your throat. Wherever you walk or stand, I shall follow your tracks. Whatever you call forth by day I shall slay by night.”

Spring raised his head and strode through the valley. He

plucked harder at the strings of his lute and every tree in the forest bent forward to listen. The earth sighed under the snow, the waves of the river stood still and heard and then joined in the song, as they leapt towards the sea. Winter himself swallowed his anger for a moment and listened to Spring's song:

In vain thy prayer would soften, in
vain thy menace frighten;
Behind the blackest cloud-wrack, the
sunbeams laugh and lighten.

It rang through the valley in long, loud, solemn tones; and Echo answered from every hill and mountain.

But Winter shook his

clenched fists to the sky and shouted aloud:

“Out, all my mighty storms! Out with you, out! Burst down upon the valley and shatter and destroy all this! Rush over the hills and snap every tree in the forest! Overturn the mountains, if you can, and crush yonder green mountebank beneath them!”

Out rushed the storm; and the snow came. It was awful weather. The trees creaked and crashed and fell, the river overflowed its banks, the foam of the waves spurted right up to the sky, great avalanches of snow poured down the mountain-slope.

But Spring went his way
through the valley and sang, in
ever fuller and stronger tones:

Let all thy loud winds bluster, let all
thy tempest bellow;
Let all thy white, bright snow-birds
loose, across the meadow flying!
Behold my foot is on the bridge and
all the ice-flowers dying!
Thou knowest thy power in the vale
has met its conquering fellow.

“Better than that!” shouted
Winter. “Roar, storm; whirl,
snow; lash, rain; beat, hail!”

And the storm roared louder;
and the snow whirled down. It
grew as dark as though the sun,
the moon and all the stars had
been put out. Great blocks of
stone rolled down over the val-

ley; the mountains shook and split. It was as though the end of the world had come.

But high through the murk shone Spring's green garb; and louder than storm and thunder rang his song. Earth and air and water sang with him: the poorest blade of grass beneath the snow, the crow in the wood, the worm in the mould, each of them joined in the song according to its power. Even the trees that fell in the forest under the onslaught of the storm confessed Spring in the hour of their death:

Thou knowest it were best to yield
to save thy might from falling;
Thou knowest I am come to drape
the porch of Summer's palace.

Thy victims, harried on the hills and
murdered in the valleys,
Awake to life, to happy life, at my
soft song's recalling.

Then Winter gave in.

The storm flew north over the
mountains with a howl; and it
stopped snowing. The river
returned to its bed. Now and
again there was a crash in the
forest, when a branch that had
been struck by lightning fell to
the ground. Otherwise all was
still.

And then it began to thaw.

The snow had often sparkled
in the sun and rejoiced, but that
was a different sun from the one
that now stared down upon it.
The sun now riding in the sky

disliked the snow and the snow disliked the sun.

“What on earth do *you* want here?” asked the sun and stared with ever-increasing curiosity.

And the snow felt quite awkward and wished itself miles away. It melted up above till great holes came; and it melted down below till it suddenly collapsed and turned to nothing, more or less. Everywhere underneath it, the water ran in rills: through the wood, down the hillside, over the meadow, out in the river, which carried it patiently to the sea. Everywhere stood puddles of water, large and small; they soaked slowly into the ground, as its frozen crust

disappeared by degrees. But sometimes they had to wait, for the ground was hard put to it to drink so much at a time.

And, while it thawed, harder and harder, and the coat of snow grew thinner every day, Spring stood on the edge of the wood and bowed to the earth and sang:

My little snowdrop, gentle sprite,
Thy heart was ever brave and bright.
Not once it faltered, pierced with
fright,
At Winter's white wrath bleeding.

Under Spring's song, a hundred snowdrops burst from the ground and shone forth white and green. They nodded their

heavy heads; and Spring nodded to them. But then he went on, till he stopped again, farther away, and sang:

And quick, each tiny crocus, too,
Put on your frocks of daintiest hue,
Frocks yellow, white and dusky-blue,
In full first clusters leading!

The crocuses at once opened their flowers and strutted, short as they were, for they were ever so proud of being among the first. But, while they were still swarming out, already Spring was in a fresh place and sang:

Climb, whitlow-grass, thy willow-
mast!
O where art thou? Yet sleeping fast?
Thou wast not wont to enter last:
Up, lower plants preceding!

And all the willow-branches
were filled forthwith with the
yellow flowers of the whitlow-
grass, which nodded gladly to the
crocuses and snowdrops. And
Spring sang again:

Dear fresh spurge-laurel, briskly
grow!

Thou, whose keen lance with fiery
glow

Would burst the lap of the cold snow,
Come forth: obey my pleading!

There stood the spurge-laurel,
like a bright-red birch-rod ready
for use on Ash Wednesday.
But Spring pulled the lower
branches of the bush aside and
bent still more deeply towards
the ground and sang more softly
than ever:

Thou of all symbols, dearest yet,
My true, my lovely violet!
Soon sun will burn, soon rain will
wet:
Be ready, no call needing!

And the violet shot up its
broad green leaves from the
ground to show Spring that it
was ready.

Then the mist floated out over
the valley. No one could see
where it came from, but it came
and remained for many a long
day.

They were strange, silent
days. Everywhere, everything
oozed and bubbled and rustled
and seethed in the ground; and
there was not a sound besides.
Noiselessly, the mist glided over

the hills and into the woods and hung heavy dew-drops on every single twig. And the dew-drops dripped and fell from morn till eve and from eve till morn.

So thick was the mist that the river was hidden in it, till one could only hear it flow. And the hills were hidden and the woods, till one saw nothing but the outside trees and even that only as shadows against the damp, grey wall of mist.

But where the mist was thickest there was Spring. And the thicker the mist grew the brighter shone Spring's green garb. And, all the time that the water oozed and the dew-drops

dripped and the river flowed,
Spring sang:

Softly slipping,
Little drop, go dripping, dripping!

But up in the mountains lay
the Prince of Winter and
lurked. He saw how the snow
melted and disappeared; he
saw the flowers come and could
do nothing to prevent it. The
snow melted right up in the
mountains; and he felt that it
would become a bad business
indeed if he did not put a stop
to it.

So he stole down to the val-
ley in the darkness of the night;
and, next morning, there was ice
on the puddles and the mist lay

beaten down upon the meadow
in sparkling hoar-frost.

But, when the young Prince
of Spring saw this, he only
laughed:

“That’s no use,” he said.

Then he raised his young face
to the sky and called:

“Sun! Sun!”

And the sun appeared.

The clouds parted at once;
and the sun melted the ice and
the hoar-frost. Then he hid
again behind the clouds. The
mist floated over the hills anew,
everything oozed and bubbled
and rustled and dripped. The
snowdrop and the crocus and the
willow-wood blossomed that it
was a joy to see; and the violet

cautiously stuck its buds above ground.

“Now all is well!” said Spring.

And, as he spoke, a sprightly wind came darting over the hills.

It shook the dew-drops from the boughs of the trees, till they fell to the ground in a splashing rain. Then it fluttered through the old dry grass in the meadow, crested the waves of the river and scattered the mist in no time. Then it set about drying the wet ground and drove the clouds over the mountains. There they remained hanging and hid the angry face of Winter. But, day after day, the sun rode in a bright blue sky; and it grew warm in the valley.

Then the violet burst forth.
It hid bashfully among its broad
green leaves, but its scent spread
wide over the meadow. And
Spring plucked at the strings of
his lute and sang till the valley
rang again:

In azure now out of grey mist grew
My own sweet violet, shy and blue,
 With eyes of smiling sunshine
And tears of diamond dew.

And, when Spring had sung
that song—and it rang to the
top of the mountain, to the bot-
tom of the river, to the very ends
of the valley—then everything
came on at about the same time
and at a pace that can hardly be
described.

At night, the valley was full of sound. But none could hear it whose heart was not full of green boughs. For it was the sound of buds bursting, little green sheaths unrolling, twigs stretching, flowers opening, scent spreading and grass growing.

By day, it was sometimes sunshine and sometimes rain, but always good. And what happened then could be seen by any one who had eyes to see with.

First, the ground in the wood became quite white with anemones. So white did it all become that the Prince of Winter, who was peeping down through a rift in the clouds, thought for a moment that there was snow. He

was gladder than he had been since February. But, when he saw his mistake, he stole into the wood one night, for the last time, and bit in two the necks of all the flowers that he could.

But a thousand new ones came for every one that died. And in the midst of the anemones stood the larkspur and the lungwort, which had blue and red flowers, to suit your fancy; the star of Bethlehem, which was a bright golden-yellow, but modest nevertheless; the wood-sorrel, which was so delicate that it withered if you but touched it; the cowslip; and the speedwell, which was small enough, but very blue and proud as Lucifer.

The meadow got itself a brand-new grass carpet, ornamented with yellow patches of buttercups and dandelions. Along the ditches it was bordered with dear little cuckoo-flowers and out towards the river it had a fringe of rushes that grew broader and thicker day by day. Below, from the bottom of the lake, sprang the water-lily's thick stalks, vying one with the other who should reach the surface first; and the frogs, who had been sitting in the mud and moping all through the winter, crawled out and stretched their hindlegs and swam up and uttered their first "Quack! Quack!" in such a way that you

could not have helped feeling touched.

But the crows and the sparrows and the chaffinches, who had spent the winter down in the valley, raised so great a hubbub that it seemed as though they had taken leave of their senses. They ran round the meadow and pecked at the soft ground and nibbled at the grass, though they knew quite well that it would disagree with them. They flapped their wings and shouted, "Hurrah for Spring!" in a way that showed they meant it. The tit was there too and the wren, small as she was. For they had been there all the time, like the others, and fared just as hard.

And the crow simply did not know which leg to stand upon. He started a croaking-match with his old woman, with whom he had lived the year before and all through the winter and with whom, since last February, he had had a great quarrel about a dead stickleback. The sparrow sat down beside *his* missus, stuck his nose in the air and sang as though he were the nightingale himself. The tit was perfectly delirious with spring. He shut his eyes and told his mate the maddest stories about delicious worms and big, fat flies that flew right down your throat without your having to stir a wing. And Mr. Chaffinch got himself a

grand new red shirt-front, which made Mrs. Chaffinch nearly swoon away with admiration. But the wren, whose husband had died of hunger at Christmas, preened and polished her feathers so that she might be taken for the young and lively widow that she was.

And the Prince of Spring laughed and nodded kindly to them:

“You are a smart lot, one and all of you,” he said. “And you have gone through trouble and deserve a happy day. But now I must get hold of my own birds.”

He turned to the South and clapped his hands and sang:

Come, sweet lark and siskin small,
Blackcap, do not dally!
Swallow, thrush, come one, come all!
Spring is in the valley.

Up and down fly all day through,
Fear no wintry shadow!
Earth is green and heaven is blue,
Flowers spring in the meadow.

Singing, piping, hasten here!
Come, each tuneful darling!
Come from far and come from near,
Lapwing, stork and starling!

Then the air hummed with the
beat of a thousand wings and the
army of birds of passage fell like
a host upon the valley. Each
night the air was vocal with the
passing of the birds; and in
the morning there was no end
to the twittering.

There sat the starling and whistled in his black dress-coat, with all the orders on his breast. The swallow swept through the air; siskin and linnet, nightingale and blackcap hopped about in the copsewood. The reed-warbler struck his trills in the rushes along the river-banks so touchingly that one could weep to hear it, the thrush took the deep notes and the goldfinch the high ones, the cuckoo ventured upon his first call and the lapwing sat on his mound and swaggered. But the stork walked in the meadow and never vouchsafed a smile.

Meanwhile, the whole wood had come out, but the leaves

were still small, so that the sun was able to peep down at the anemones. Lilies of the valley distilled their fragrance for dainty nostrils and woodruffs theirs for noses of the humbler sort. The green flowers of the beech dangled from the new thin twigs; cherry and black-thorn were white from top to toe; valerian and star of Bethlehem and lousewort did their best. The shepherd's pouch, that blossomed the whole year round, was annoyed that no one took any notice of it, but the orchis stood and looked mysterious and uncanny, because it had such strange tubers in the ground.

Far in the beech-thicket, where



it was greenest and prettiest, sat
a lovesick siskin and courted his
sweetheart, who hopped on a
twig beside him and looked as if
she simply could not understand
what he was driving at.

He sang:

If only, love, thou wilt be mine,
If now my singing heard is,
A nest I'll give thee soft and fine
With four delightful birdies.

Where rows of beech a glade enfold,
We'll build with toil and trembling;
Our birdies shall have beaks of gold,
Their Daddy much resembling.

To thee I'll prove both true and kind,
While bonds of love secure thee;
Of flies such multitudes I'll find
As no words could ensure thee.

At dawn of day I labour will,
 The nest shall be thy keeping;
 Each night, when sunset seeks the
 hill,
 I'll serenade thee sleeping.

When he had sung his ditty to
 the end, he looked hard at her
 and, as she did not answer him
 at once, he gave her a sound peck
 with his beak.

“Don't do that!” she said.

But, when he ceased pecking
 at her and raised his wings, as
 though he meant to fly away, she
 hastened to sing:

Yes, I will be thy own dear love,
 Of bairns we'll prate together;
 With few would I have flown, dear
 love;
 So preen a prouder feather!

Then they flew singing through the wood. And they were hardly gone before two other birds came and sat on the same twig and sang the same thing in another manner.

But the leaves of the beech grew and there came more and more. They gathered closer and closer over the wood and, one fine day, it was quite impossible for the sun to find a hole to peep through.

Then the anemones became seriously frightened:

“Shine on us, Sun, or we shall die!” they cried.

They cried to the wind to sweep the horrid leaves away, so that the sun could see his own

dear little anemones. They cried to the beech that it ought to be ashamed of itself, great, strong tree that it was, for wishing to kill innocent flowers. They cried to Spring to help them in their distress.

But the sun did not see them and Spring did not hear them and the beech took no heed of them and the wind laughed at them. There was such gladness in the valley that it drowned their voices; and they died quite unnoticed.

Every single day, new flowers came which were radiant and fragrant. Every single day, the birds discovered a new trill to add to their song. The stag

belled in the glade, before even the sun was up, and the hind answered and sprang. Every second, the fish leapt in the water; and there was no end to the croaking of the frogs in the ditch. The snake wriggled along the edge of the brook and made play with his tongue; in every hedge sat small brown mice exchanging amorous looks. Even the flies buzzed more fondly than usual.

But, when the gladness was at its highest, the young Prince of Spring stood at the top of the valley, where the mountains enclose it towards the North. He looked out over his kingdom. His eyes were moist and

dreamy, his mouth was ever smiling. He loosened from his shoulder the green silk ribbon in which his lute was slung, plucked once more at the strings and hummed to its accompaniment. It was a beautiful, hazy day, a day on which the birds subdued their songs and the flowers closed their petals.

And Spring bowed over a little blue flower that sprouted at his foot and sang, sadly:

Forget-me-not blue,
 Thou dreamy one,
 Thou charming one,
 Thou sweet one!

Then he went northwards.
 And, wherever he set his foot,

the snow melted and the flowers burst forth.

But, when he had come to the last place from which he could see the valley, he turned round.

And far away towards the South, where the valley runs into the plain, stood the Prince of Summer, tall and straight. His face and his hands were brown with the sun, his eyes gentle and warm as the sun. Over his shoulder he wore a purple cloak, around his loins a golden girdle. In the girdle was a wonderful red rose.

Then Spring bowed low and went away over the mountains.

SUMMER

CHAPTER III



SUMMER

*Now bosky darkness grows.
The gradual summer-light bestows
Faint star-light on each hollow.*

NONE had noticed Spring's farewell or Summer's coming.

The birds sang and the flies buzzed. The gnats danced up and down in the air, till the swallow broke up the ball; the flowers smelt sweet, the frogs croaked, the stag belled in the glade. There was no end to the universal gladness.

And, while the mountains were still turning green wherever

Spring had set his foot, right up to Winter's eternal snows on the peaks, the Prince of Summer stood for a time and surveyed the kingdom which Spring had quitted.

His form sent forth so sunny a radiance that it grew hotter in the valley than it ever had been. His eyes shone, his purple cloak beamed, the golden girdle around his loins blazed like fire, the red rose in his girdle glowed.

When he had stood a while, he raised his hand, as though he would bid them be still. But none heeded him. The siskin hopped in the thicket with his sweetheart, gave her loving looks and pecked at her with his beak.

The fish sported merrily in the water, the meadow displayed all its glories and the wood stood lost in green dreams.

The Prince of Summer smiled and raised his hand once more. When this had no effect, he knitted his brows and his face darkened.

And, at that moment, a veil passed over the sun. From east and west, thick clouds came slowly over the hills, thicker and blacker than the valley had yet seen and with strange, thick edges. From the clouds rolled the thunder, distant and muffled, but such that none could doubt its power.

The clouds came nearer and it

grew ever darker, but no less hot for that. Inside the wood, it was as though it were evening. The wind took fright and ran away behind the hills and subsided. The air was singularly close and heavy. The leaves of the trees hung slack, as though they were sick, and the flowers hastened to shut their petals. No one knew what became of the flies, but they were gone. The little brown mice forgot their amorous nonsense and sat in their parlours and squeaked. The stag took shelter behind the thickest bushes; the croak of the frogs stuck in their throats and they went down to the bottom as if Winter were at the door. The

birds looked round under the leafage and stared with frightened eyes.

And the Prince of Summer was no longer all light and sunshine. Gradually, as the clouds closed up, the radiance that flowed from him was extinguished. At last, he stood at the end of the valley like a mighty black cloud in a warrior's form.

Then there suddenly came a humming over the hills till every breath of wind had left them altogether. The trees bent low in great dismay; the river rose and leapt away like a horse that rears and shies.

Then it sounded as if a thou-

sand light feet were running over the ground: it was the first rain-drops coming. The next moment, the rain poured down till every sound was drowned in its splashing.

There came a terrible lightning, which made everything visible, but which dazzled all eyes, so that they could not see. Then came the blackest darkness and then the thunder, till the mountains shook again.

But through the thunder sounded Summer's accents; and never had any heard so loud a voice:

"It is I, Summer, who am come to reign over the land. Mine is the thunder that roars

over the valley. Hark! . . .
The echo rolls from the mountains; the earth rumbles under my foot: it is Summer coming."

The thunder ceased, but the rain kept on pouring. And through the rain spoke Summer's accents; and never had any heard so soft a voice:

"It is I, Summer, who am come to reign over the land. All that is green shall be greener still; all that is fair shall be a thousand-fold fairer. The scent of the flower shall be sweeter yet; and the sound of the bird's trill shall be deeper and fuller. The days shall break earlier in the East and be lighter and warmer; the nights shall be cool

and still; and there shall be no end to the joy of the morning nor to the evening's peace."

When the Prince of Summer had spoken, while all things in the valley bowed and listened and understood, the thunder ceased and the rain fell no longer.

Tall and straight and radiant, Summer advanced through his kingdom.

And, wherever he came, the clouds parted and vanished east and west behind the hills. The sky grew clear again and the drops of water that hung on every twig and every blade of grass glistened in the sunlight. The flowers opened, the birds

came out from under the leafage, the stag left his cover and plunged his muzzle into the wet grass.

But, when the last cloud was gone and the sun had dried up the last drop of water and every single trace of the storm was removed, nevertheless things were nowhere the same as they were before the thunder passed over the valley.

More flowers came and new flowers; and their scent was sweeter and their colour brighter, even as the Prince of Summer had said. But it was as though they had all become more serious. They no longer swung so carelessly on their stalks, no

longer scattered their scent so lavishly to every wind. But, when a bee or a butterfly came flitting up, all the flowers stretched their necks and shed a redoubled radiance and fragrance and cried their honey aloud, so that the insects might come along and take their pollen-ware.

Nor did the bees themselves have so good a time as in the green days of Spring. At home, in the hive, their queen was laying eggs by the hundred; and they had to sweat wax and build cells and fetch honey and pollen, till they were nigh dying with exhaustion. And there were so many flowers that the

bees did not know where to turn. In the wood, they got drunk on the sweet scent of the linden-blossom and the honey-suckle; beside the brook, they fluttered plump into the red cap of the poppy. Not one of them was man enough to say no to those flower-cups: the thistle and the burdock, the dandelion and the wild chamomile, all kept them hard at work. Did they come to the hedge, the elderberry called them; would they rest in the grass, the bindweed offered them its chalice with fresh dew-drops on the edge and honey at the bottom; did they fly across the lake, the water-lily lay with her white and yellow

blossoms and nodded on the silent waters.

And even as with the flowers and the bees, so it was everywhere. Not anywhere were things as they had been.

However many trills the siskin struck for his sweetheart, however fondly he put his head upon one side, however eagerly he pecked at her with his beak, she minded not a jot, but stared silently and seriously before her:

"There's that nest," she said, at last.

"Of course, of course," replied the siskin and looked as though he had never thought of anything else.

"Yes, but it's *urgent!*" said

she. "We shall have the eggs before the week is out."

Then they found a place where they felt like building and together they set to work.

But, wherever they hopped after a twig for which they had a use, already other birds were hopping on the same errand and, wherever they flew after a feather in the air, they had to hurry, lest another should snatch it first. If he got hold of a lovely long horsehair, there would never fail to be some one pulling at the other end; and, if she flew out for some nice moss which she had noticed the day before, she could be sure that her fair neighbour had been to

fetch it that morning. For every young couple in the wood was out after furniture and fittings.

At last, the two siskins got their house built; and the other birds did the same. There was not in the wood a bush so poor but it carried a nest in its bosom. In every nest lay eggs; and on the eggs sat a smart little bird-wife looking round watchfully with her black eyes and boring herself most wretchedly. Every moment, her husband would come home with a fly or a worm or some other good nourishing food, as he had promised and as his duty bade him. When evening came, all the bird-husbands

sat faithfully on the edge of the nest and sang, each with his little beak, so touchingly and prettily that their wives thought it delightful to be alive.

But up in the tall trees the crow-wives sat on their eggs; and on the cliffs the eagles' consorts lay brooding.

Everywhere they were busy preparing for the babies; but not everywhere was there so pretty a family-life as in the bushes in the wood.

True, Mrs. Fox had her hole deep down in the hill-side, where her youngsters lay as snug as in their grandmother's chest of drawers. But the timid hare dropped her young ones in the

ditch and had no notion where their unnatural father was gobbling his evening cabbage.

And the cuckoo flew round restlessly and slipped his eggs stealthily into the others' nests and cried most bitterly because he could never, never build a home for himself. Nor was the snail much better off; for she could do no more than make a hole in the ground, put her eggs into it and commend them to Providence.

The little brown mice had their parlours full of tiny, blind children, who could never wish for kinder or more thoughtful parents. But Goody Mole, down in the earth, had to eat her own

dirty husband as soon as she had had her babies, lest *he* should eat the little innocents for his lunch. And the gnat-husbands danced heedlessly in the evening air, as though they had nothing better to do, while their respective spouses, in great affliction, laid their eggs in the water.

But the brown frog sat by the ditch-side and wrung her hands in speechless horror at the strange tadpole-children which she had brought into the world.

And the sun shone and the rain fell on those who were comfortable indoors and on those who had to take things as they came. Goody Mole worked for two, like the decent widow that she was;

and the hare suckled her young so that they might gain strength quickly and leap away from the eagle and the fox. The cuckoo uttered his sorrowful note among the tall trunks of the forest; and Mother Gnat let her eggs sail the pond for themselves, since that was all that she could do for them, after which she settled in the stag's ear and helped herself to a drop of blood to repay her for her exertions.

But the Prince of Summer was with them all. He knew of the smallest gnat and forgot not a flower in the meadow:

"It is well!" he said.

And, every day that passed, his purple cloak beamed, the

golden girdle around his loins
blazed, the red rose in his girdle
glowed.

Then it happened that a shocking cry rang out through the forest. It was so loud that everything around grew silent and all listened to hear what it could be.

The one who had uttered the cry was an old, gnarled oak who stood among a crowd of fine young beeches:

“Prince of Summer, come to my aid!” he shouted. “Don’t you see that the beeches are stifling me? Before you have made your entry twice more into the valley, I shall be dead and buried under their shade.”

“I see it,” said Summer, calmly.

“You see it?” cried the oak and wrung his old branches in despair. “You see it and you don’t help me? Woe is me, to have a prince like you! Then Spring indeed was a different sort of gracious lord and king. There was not in the forest a stick so dry but he readily gave it a green leaf or two.”

But the Prince of Summer looked with indifference at the old, dying oak:

“I was never responsible for Spring’s green promises,” he replied. “I reign here according to my own law; and the law ordains that you shall die. What

do I want with a fagot like you in my healthy forests?"

Then he turned to the beeches and said:

"I gave you strength to grow. I give you twofold strength and tenfold. Hasten and put that old gentleman to rest!"

And the beeches shot up aloft and threw their shade over the oak till he died.

But there were others besides the oak that made their complaints to the Prince of Summer. Every day and every hour of the day there was one that threw up the sponge and shrieked for help.

There was the grass, which cried because the stag ate it.

“I made your number as the sand of the sea,” said the Prince of Summer. “I gave you hardiness and a quick growth; I gave you the wind to carry your seed across the meadows. For you I have done enough.”

And there was the stag, who bellowed because the best grass was gone. To him the Prince of Summer said:

“I gave you swift legs, so that you could bound where the grass is greenest in the forest. If your legs are tired, then lay you down to die; and the hind’s fawns shall walk in your footsteps.”

There were the fish in the river, who ate one another’s eggs

and young and then blamed Summer.

"What would you have me do?" asked Summer. "I gave you power to lay a thousand eggs and a thousand more and a thousand besides. However many may die, there will always be fish in the river."

And there were the flowers that sighed because there were not bees enough to carry off their pollen. But the Prince of Summer said:

"I presented you with honey to give to the bees for a messenger's fee and taught you to hide it so that they must take your pollen into the bargain. I gave you delicious perfumes and beau-

tiful colours wherewith to entice the bees. You call them and they come; and the one that promises most and keeps its promise best is the one they obey most quickly."

But, every time that Summer spoke, there was a new one that wailed:

"There are too few worms!" cried the siskin, who now had four youngsters in the nest and was wearing himself to a skeleton in the effort to provide food for them. "We are starving. We can never hold out!"

"There are too many birds!" whined the worm in the mould. "If one but stirs out for a moment, one is eaten up."

“Deliver us from the stork!”
prayed the frogs.

“Provide more frogs,” cried
the stork, “or I shall have to go
elsewhere!”

And the beech complained be-
cause the cockchafer ate its
leaves; and the crows could never
get cockchafers enough. The
bees whined about the flowers,
as the flowers had done about
the bees: they considered that it
was much too hard to get hold of
the honey. The hare ran away
from the fox and fell into the
talons of the eagle. The young
ash in the hedge raised his voice
to heaven against the honey-
suckle that twined itself right
up to his top.

But the Prince of Summer stood tall and straight and radiant and surveyed his kingdom. His smile was wide and bright and there was no pity in his hard eyes. He raised his hand, as though to bid them be silent, but none heeded him; and the noise increased hourly and the land was full of cries and lamentations.

Then he knitted his brows and called the thick black clouds from behind the hills. They came at his beck; fear lay over the valley again; and the cries were silenced. The thunder rolled till the mountains shook, the lightning flamed, the rain poured.

And Summer's great voice
sounded through the air:

"Know you not that I am a
lord as stern as Winter, whom
you hate? He reigns over death,
as I do over life. I will be
obeyed, like him; like him, I
crush whatever resists me. You
thought I was a minstrel like
Spring, who sang you to life and
longing and went off over the
mountains. But I am greater
than Spring. For I satisfied
your desires with food and made
you subject to the law of life.
But the law is this, that that
which is hale shall stand, but that
which is sick shall fall. There-
fore I made my days long, that
you should become green and

grow. Therefore I gave you strength and power in a thousand ways, the smallest gnat as well as the tallest tree in the forest, so that you should fight and grow up. Therefore I gave you children, so that you should never perish. And whoso obeys my law and well employs the day, upon him the sunlight of my eyes shall fall. His strength shall reign, his children shall bear his name throughout the ages. But whoso flinches, he shall die."

The Prince of Summer was silent and the thunder rolled away slowly over the mountains. The clouds parted and vanished; it became night. The stars

shone bright and friendly, the trees dripped and all was still.

But, next morning, the valley awoke to fiercer fighting and louder cries than ever.

For there was not a bird in the forest nor a flower in the meadow but had heard what the Prince of Summer said and understood it. They all knew what it meant and armed themselves, before sunrise, for the fight for life.

The siskin and his wife hunted twice as eagerly in the thicket; the little brown mice dug twice as diligently; the flowers redoubled their radiance and their fragrance. Goody Mole rummaged the ground in every di-

rection; the stag found a meadow where the grass stood high and green. The beech put forth new twigs in the place of those which the cockchafers had eaten; and the ash stretched its bows right through the honeysuckle to show Summer that it was alive.

Thousands died, but none heard their death-moan, because of the din that arose from the fight of the living. And it was as though more lives came for each life that was extinguished.

The siskin's youngsters hopped out of the nest and fell from the branch and fluttered up again. The crow's children screamed in the tree-tops; the young eagles flew from the rock to try their

wings. The starling drove her first brood from the nest and laid new eggs; the frog lived to see her degenerate young grow quite respectable before she herself was swallowed by the stork.

Never had the fish swarmed so thickly in the river, never had the beech's leaves been so broad, never had the copsewood been so dense, never had the flowers pressed so close together in the hedge.

And the Prince of Summer stood amidst his kingdom taller and straighter and more radiant than ever:

"It is well!" he said.

Then evening came. The crows flew home from their de-

bating-club in the old, dead oak; the little birds in the thicket sang their evensong in chorus, but made it short, for they were very tired. The flowers shut their petals; the bees closed the door of their hive. The moth flew out on her soft, grey wings. The stars peeped out, ever more and ever larger.

Carefully, the mist raised its head and spied and listened. And, when all was still, it welled forth, white and grey and billowy and noiseless. Now it lay quiet and dreamed, now it danced its queer dances over the meads. It peeped into the wood, where the lime-tree was shedding its perfume; it glided

down to the river, which ran and ran and was swallowed up in the darkness.

But, suddenly, from the edge of the wood, a long and jubilant trill rang out over the valley:

Weet-a...weet-a...weet-a...weet-a
...weet-a...weet-a...weet!

The mist stopped and listened. The stag raised his head in the meadow, the birds opened their sleepy eyes and answered with a little chirp.

Weet-a...weet-a...weet-a...weet-a
...weet-a...weet-a...weet!

It was the nightingale, who sang:

Now bosky darkness grows.
The gradual summer-night bestows

Faint starlight on each hollow.
 The merry little swallow
 Has hied him to repose.
 Weet-a...weet-a...weet-a...weet-a
 ...weet-a...weet-a...weet!
 While now the moon through Heaven
 sails
 And all is still, blithe nightingales
 With hedgerow music follow.

Weet-a...weet-a...weet-a...weet-a
 ...weet-a...weet-a...weet!
 In sleepy clusters gleaming,
 White elders sigh, red roses start,
 Forget-me-nots lie dreaming.
 They dream of summer all night
 long
 Whose splendour thrills that joy-
 ous song
 In mellow sweetness streaming
 From the green thicket's heart. . . .

AUTUMN

CHAPTER IV



AUTUMN

*The loveliest things of Autumn's pack
In his mottled coffers lay:
Red mountain-berries,
Hips sweet as cherries,
Sloes blue and black
He hung upon every spray.*

ON the top of the hills in the West stood the Prince of Autumn and surveyed the land with his serious eyes.

His hair and beard were dashed with grey and there were wrinkles on his forehead. But he was good to look at still and

straight and strong. His splendid cloak gleamed red and green and brown and yellow and flapped in the wind. In his hand he held his horn.

He smiled sadly and stood a while and listened to the fighting and the singing and the cries. Then he raised his head, put the horn to his mouth and blew a lusty flourish:

Summer goes his all-prospering way,
Autumn's horn is calling.
Heather dresses the brown hill-clay,
Winds whip crackling across the bay,
Leaves in the grove keep falling.

All the trees of the forest
shook from root to top, themselves not knowing why. All the

birds fell silent together. The stag in the glade raised his antlers in surprise and listened. The poppy's scarlet petals flew before the wind.

But high on the mountains and on the bare hills and low down in the bog, the heather burst forth and blazed purple and glorious in the sun. And the bees flew from the faded flowers of the meadow and hid themselves in the heather-fields.

But Autumn put his horn to his mouth again and blew:

Autumn lords it with banners bright

Of garish leaves held o'er him,

Quelling Summer's eternal fight,

Heralding Winter, wild and white,

While the blithe birds flee before
him.

The Prince of Summer stopped where he stood in the valley and raised his eyes to the hills in the West. And the Prince of Autumn took the horn from his mouth and bowed low before him.

“Welcome!” said Summer.

He took a step towards him and no more, as befits one who is the greater. But the Prince of Autumn came down over the hills and again bowed low.

They walked through the valley hand in hand. And so radiant was Summer that, wherever they passed, none was aware of Autumn’s presence. The notes of his horn died away in the air; and one and all recov-

ered from the shudder that had passed over them. The trees and birds and flowers came to themselves again and whispered and sang and fought. The river flowed, the rushes murmured, the bees continued their summer orgy in the heather.

But, wherever the princes stopped on their progress through the valley, it came about that the foliage turned yellow on the side where Autumn was. A little leaf fell from its stalk and fluttered away and dropped at his feet. The nightingale ceased singing, though it was eventide; the cuckoo was silent and flapped restlessly through the woods; the stork stretched himself in his

nest and looked towards the South.

But the princes took no heed.

"Welcome!" said Summer again. "Do you remember your promise?"

"I remember," answered Autumn.

The Prince of Summer stopped and looked out over the kingdom where the noise was gradually subsiding:

"Do you hear them?" he asked. "They must die and they do not know it. Now do you take them into your gentle keeping."

"I shall bring your produce home," said Autumn. "I shall watch carefully over them that dream, I shall cover up lovingly

them that are to sleep in the mould. I will warn them thrice of Winter's coming."

"It is well," said Summer.

They walked in silence for a time, while night came forth.

"The honeysuckle's petals fell when you blew your horn," said Summer. "Some of my children will die at the moment when I leave the valley. But the nightingale and the cuckoo and the stork I shall take with me."

Again the two princes walked in silence. It was quite still; only the owls hooted in the old dead oak.

"You must send my birds after me," said Summer.

“I shall not forget,” replied Autumn.

Then the Prince of Summer raised his hand in farewell and bade Autumn take possession of the kingdom:

“I shall go to-night,” he said. “And none will know save you. My splendour will linger in the valley for a while, so that you may come more gently to those to whom you bring death. And by-and-by, when I am far away and my reign is forgotten, the memory of me will revive once more with the sun and the pleasant days.”

Then he strode away in the night.

But from the high tree-top
came the stork on his long wings;
and the cuckoo fluttered out of
the tall woods; and the nightin-
gale flew from the thicket with
his full-grown young.

The air was filled with the soft
murmuring of wings.

The Siskin couple sat and
chatted on the edge of the empty
nest:

“Do you remember the day
when I courted you?” he asked.
“I had preened and smartened
myself as best I could and you
also looked sweet. The beech
had just come out: I never saw
the wood so green in all my life!”

“How you sang!” said she.

"Sing like that again; then perhaps I will accept you once more."

But the siskin sadly shook his head:

"My voice is gone," he said.

"Do you remember when we built the nest?" she asked, a little later. "How snug it was and how nice! I shall never have so fine a house again. Just look how ugly and dilapidated it is!"

"The young ones did that," he replied.

"Yes, but do you remember the morning when they came out of the eggs?" she asked; and her small black eyes beamed. "How sweet they were and how naked and brown! I could not

leave them for a minute but they screamed."

"And then they got their feathers!" he said and strutted. "Grand siskins, all four of them. Do you remember the day they first hopped out of the nest?"

She remembered. She remembered many more things and reminded him of them all. And, when there was nothing left to say, they moved closer to each other and sat silent; and each apart thought of the old days.

And all the others were like the siskins.

The flowers bent towards one another and whispered about the

golden time when they stood with a bee in every chalice. So eager were they to tell their stories that none could wait for the other to finish. All over the meadow, it sounded:

“Do you remember . . . ?
Do you remember . . . ?”

The flies and the bees sat for half the day and idled and talked intimately and cosily of the beautiful summer days when they hummed and buzzed and reigned in the meadow. The trees waved their branches softly to one another and told long stories of their green youth. The rushes put their brown tips together and dreamt the whole thing over again. The little brown mice

sat in the hedge, in the evening sun, and told the children the story of their courtship.

“Do you remember . . . ?
Do you remember . . . ?”

In the midst of the valley stood the Prince of Autumn, with his horn in his hand. But none saw him.

Then the crow flew out of the wood on flapping wings and screamed:

“Past! Past! How can you care to talk of those old things? It’s all past! Past! Past!”

Echo sang from the hills:

“Past! Past! Past!”

And Echo whispered in the rushes and hummed in the river and sounded in all that lived in

the land. They all then and there understood that summer was over. They stopped in the middle of their stories and listened and chimed in:

“Past! Past! Past!”

And suddenly they all saw the Prince of Autumn, as he stood there in the midst of them, in his motley cloak. They stared at him with frightened eyes and at one another.

But he put his horn to his mouth and blew till it rang over the valley:

Autumn’s horn blew a lusty chime,
For the first time, for the first time!

Interpret well its warning:
September night,
Breed mushrooms white,

Lay midge in mould,
Plait bronze with gold
For green tree-tops' adorning.

He looked over the valley with his serious eyes. But, when the last echo of the notes had died away, he spread his motley cloak in the sun and laughed and nodded.

And, while the sky was higher than it had ever been and the air mild and the lake blue and the mountains stood out clear on the horizon, the land passed dutifully under Autumn's dominion.

It had indeed begun on the night when Summer went away, with a yellow leaf here and a brown leaf there, but none had noticed it. Now it went at a

quicker pace; and, as time wore on, there came ever more colours and greater splendour.

The lime-trees turned bright yellow and the beech bronze, but the elder-tree even blacker than it had been. The bell-flower rang with white bells, where it used to ring with blue, and the chestnut-tree blessed all the world with its five yellow fingers. The mountain-ash shed its leaves that all might admire its pretty berries; the wild rose nodded with a hundred hips; the Virginia creeper broke over the hedge in blazing flames.

The moss grew soft and green; and the toadstools shot up in the night. Queer, soft, pale crea-

tures they were and poisonous and envious they looked. But some of them had a scarlet hat on and all were overjoyed with life.

But the siskin could find no flies and was wailing pitifully.

"Then go away!" said the Prince of Autumn. "Your time is over; and I have plenty of birds left."

Away flew siskin and linnet and many with them. But Autumn put his horn to his mouth and blew:

The loveliest things of Autumn's
pack

In his motley coffers lay:

Red mountain-berries,

Hips sweet as cherries,

Sloes blue and black,

He hung upon every spray.

And blackbird and thrush
chattered blithely in the copse-
wood, which gleamed with ber-
ries, and a thousand sparrows
kept them company.

At night, it was quite still.
The stag went into the meadow
with noiseless steps and lifted his
antlers and reconnoitred. The
bird sat and slept somewhere
with his head under his wing;
the wind dared hardly whisper
among the faded foliage. The
stars twinkled far and peace-
fully.

Then the leaves fell.

And, as they broke from the
branches and whirled through

the air and fell to the ground, they sighed softly and filled the forest with strange, plaintive sounds. But none could hear them who had not seen his own hopes die.

But, next morning, those which were left gleamed brighter still and spread themselves and laughed in the sun, as if they had never amused themselves so well. The birch stood flirting on the moor; and the tiny little plants in the hedge sported their red leaves. The beech and the oak changed one thing or another in their dress each day, till they became more fantastic than ever. The falling leaves flew from tree to tree and remained lying there,

till the whole at last became one great confusion.

But redder than the reddest blazed the Virginia creeper; and the crows made such a din every evening in the old, dead oak that you could not hear yourself speak. The thrushes chattered, the sparrows screamed, the wind ran from one to the other and puffed and panted to add to the fun. High up in the sky, the sun looked gently down upon it all.

And the Prince of Autumn nodded contentedly and let his motley cloak flap in the wind:

“I am the least important of the four seasons and am scarcely lord in my own land,” he said.

“I serve two jealous masters and have to please them both. But my power extends so far, that I can give you a few glad days.”

Then he put his horn to his mouth and blew:

To the valley revellers hie!

They are clad in autumnal fancy-dresses,

They are weary of green and faded tresses

Summer has vanished, Winter is nigh—

Hey fol-de-rol-day for Autumn!

The beech wears a coat of red,

The oak grows feeble, his strength is shaken,

Summer's fine birds the Devil has taken!

The bees are excused, the flies are dead—

Hey fol-re-rol-day for Autumn!

The birch that was ever shy.
 Stands—look!—in her yellow
 smock unbidden,
 With scarcely a white, lank limb
 that's hidden!
 Green pines straddle towards the
 sky—
 Hey fol-re-rol-day for Autumn!

But, just as the gaiety was at
 its height and the land full of
 noise, exactly as in the fairest
 days of summer . . . there were
 two that mistook the time of
 year!

It was the cherry-tree for one
 and the strawberry-plant for
 another.

They felt the sun shining so
 very warm and saw how every-
 thing rejoiced. Then they for-
 got themselves and burst forth

anew. Carefully, they opened their white flowers and shivered at once, for it was colder than they had thought.

And, when the dainty white blossoms spread in the morning sun, all the motley trees of the wood laughed them to scorn. The crows fell off the branches with laughter, the sparrows shrieked: one and all considered it the best notion they had ever seen. But a belated bee opened six thousand great eyes and had an apoplectic fit, because she thought she had taken leave of her senses.

The Prince of Autumn looked at the flowers with moist eyes and shook his head:

"You poor little ninnies!" he said, sadly.

But the Virginia creeper flung her warm red arms around them and said that they were sweet.

The blossoms thrived and grew; and one of them even put forth a tiny green berry. And, when the others saw that, they gave up laughing and began to think about it. The alder looked itself up and down and reflected that it still was quite green; and the birch was nearly sinking into the ground for shame at its nakedness. The old frog suddenly said, "Quack!" and was so startled at this that she plunged head fore-

most to the bottom of the lake. The sparrow suddenly felt lonely and looked round fondly among the daughters of the land.

But the beech shook up a heap of brown leaves and clung convulsively to those which were green:

"It *may* be possible," it said to itself and, then and there, put out three new shoots.

But, the night after this happened, there was a tremendous disturbance up on the mountain-peaks, where the eternal snows had lain both in Spring's time and Summer's. It sounded like a storm approaching. The trees grew frightened, the crows were

silent, the wind held its breath.

The Prince of Autumn bent forward and listened:

“Is that the worst you can do?” shouted a hoarse voice through the darkness.

Autumn raised his head and looked straight into Winter’s great, cold eyes.

“Have you forgotten the bargain?” asked Winter.

“No,” replied Autumn. “I have not forgotten it. But, if they must die, at least give them leave to dance.”

“Have a care!” shouted Winter.

The whole night through, it rumbled and tumbled in the mountains. It turned so bitter-

ly cold that the starling thought seriously of packing up; and even the red creeper turned pale. When the sun rose, the cherry-blossoms and strawberry-blossoms hung dead upon their stalks.

The distant peaks glittered with new snow.

And the Prince of Autumn laughed no more. He looked out earnestly over the land and the wrinkles in his forehead grew deeper:

“It must be so then!” he said.

Then he blew his horn:

Autumn’s horn blew a lusty chime;
For the second time, for the second
time!

Heed well the call, complying:

Fling seed to earth!
Fill sack's full girth!
Plump back and side!
Pad belt and hide!

Hold all wings close for flying!

Then suddenly a terrible bustle arose in the land. For now they all understood that fortune was on the ebb; and all thought that there was something they had forgotten or something they were not ready with.

Round about the thicket, the bushes shouted aloud:

“Buy my hips! Who'll buy?”

“Service-berries! Service-berries! Fine red service-berries!”

“Blackberries! Fresh blackberries!”

“Sloes! Sloes! Sloes!”

And the thrush and the black-bird swept down upon them and gorged themselves with the good berries till they were well provided for their journey. The sparrows ate all they could get down; the crows drove the others away and guzzled.

“Quick!” said Autumn. “Remove that finery!”

The poppy and the bellflower and the pink stood thin and dry as sticks, with their heads full of seed. The dandelion had presented each one of his seeds with a sweet little parachute.

“Come, dear Wind, and shake us!” said the poppy.

“Fly away with my seeds,
Wind!” said the dandelion.

And the wind hastened to do
as they asked.

But the beech cunningly
dropped his shaggy fruit on to
the hare’s fur; and the fox got
one also on *his* red coat. Thus
they carried the beech’s children
out into the world without hav-
ing the least suspicion what they
were doing.

“Quick, now!” said Autumn.
“There’s no time here to waste.”

The little brown mice filled
their parlours from floor to ceil-
ing with nuts and beech-mast
and acorns. The hedgehog had
already eaten himself so fat that
he could hardly lower his quills,

but still loitered around all night to get more food. The hare and the fox and the stag put on clean white woollen things under their coats. The starling and the thrush and the blackbird saw to their downy clothing and exercised their wings for the long journey. The sparrows were envious that they could not go too; as for the crows, nothing seemed to hurt them; and the lapwing sat on his tussock and looked lonely.

But the bat went right away and hung himself on his own hindlegs deep down in a hollow tree.

“Quick!” said Autumn. “It will be over in a week.”

The sun hid himself behind the clouds and did not appear for many days.

It began to rain. The wind quickened its pace: it dashed the rain over the meadow, whipped the river into foam and whistled uncannily through the trunks in the forest. The leaves fell without ceasing.

"Now the song is finished!" said the Prince of Autumn.

Then he put his horn to his mouth and blew:

Autumn's horn blew a lusty chime,
For the last time, for the last time!

Ways close when need is sorest:
Land-birds, fly clear!
Plunge, frogs, in mere!

Bee, lock your lair!

Take shelter, bear!

Fall, last leaf in the forest!

And then it was over.

It all went at such a rate that one could hardly tell how it began or how it ended.

The birds flew from the land in flocks. The starling and the lapwing, the thrush and the blackbird all migrated to the South. Every night, the sparrow heard their chirping and the fluttering of their wings in the air.

Every morning, before the sun rose, the wind tore through the forest and pulled the last leaves off the trees. Every day, the wind blew stronger, snapped

great branches, swept the withered leaves together into heaps, scattered them again and, at last, laid them like a soft, thick carpet over the whole floor of the forest. Here and there, a single leaf hung on a twig and resisted and refused to die. But this was only a short respite, for, if it did not fall to-day, it fell to-morrow.

The hedgehog crawled so far into a hole under a heap of stones that he remained caught between two of them and could move neither forwards nor backwards. The sparrow took lodgings in a deserted swallow's-nest; the frogs went to the bottom of the pond for good, settled in the

mud, with the tips of their noses up in the water, and prepared for whatever might come. The waves loosened the water-lily's stalks and washed them clean away; the rushes snapped in the storm and drifted with the stream.

The Prince of Autumn stood and gazed over the land to see if it was bare and waste, so that Winter's storms might come buffeting at will and the snow lie where it pleased.

And so empty was it that the sun rose later, morning after morning, and went earlier to bed, evening after evening, because he did not think that he had anything to shine upon.

“Now I’m coming!” roared Winter from the mountains. “My clouds are bursting with snow; and my storms are breaking loose.”

“I have one day left,” said Autumn.

He walked across the meadow, where already the grass was yellow and the flowers gone, except the little white daisy, which can never get done in time. Then he went into the naked wood. He peeped at the hedgehog, smiled at the little brown mice, who carried the shells neatly and decently outside the parlour each time they had had a nut-feast, patted the strong beech-trunks and asked them if they could

stand the storm and nodded to the jolly crows.

Then he stopped before the old, dead oak and looked at the ivy that clambered right up to the top and spread her green leaves as if Winter had no existence at all.

And, while he looked at it with eyes that were gentle and moist like Spring's, the ivy-flowers blossomed. They sat right at the top and rocked in the wind, yellow-green and insignificant, but just as good flowers as any of those which grew in Summer's kingdom.

"Now I can restrain my storms no longer!" roared Winter.

The Prince of Autumn bent his head and listened. He could hear the storm come rushing down over the mountains. A snowflake fell upon his motley cloak . . . and another . . . and yet another . . .

For the last time, he put his horn to his mouth and blew in sad and subdued tones:

Thou greenest plant and tardiest,
Thou fairest, rarest, hardiest,
Bright through unending hours!
Round Summer, Winter, Autumn,
Spring,
Thy vigorous embraces cling.
Look! Ivy mine, 'tis *I* who sing,
'Tis *Autumn* wins thy flowers!

Then he went away in the storm.

WINTER

CHAPTER V.



WINTER

*Wee snow-birds, white snow-birds,
White snow-birds, wee snow-birds,
Through fields skim along!*

WINTER was on the mountains, but his face was hidden by thick clouds that lay in wait, ready to burst and let loose all the evil that was in them.

Now and again, the clouds parted a little. But that was only for a moment; and, when it happened, the snow-clad peaks glittered in the sun till you could look at nothing else and could hardly bear to look at them.

And, even when the storm flew wildest over the valley and the river foamed and the trees cracked and broke and fell, even then the clouds lay thick and close before the face of Winter.

Sometimes, some of them dissolved into mists, which swept down upon the valley and filled it quite. But they were different mists from those which Spring laid over the land. No violets came from *them*; in *their* lap were no crops and no longing and no life. They were as cold as if there were no sun at all behind them.

Sometimes, it rained, in a dense and endless downpour, day after day. The blast dashed

the rain into the eyes of the hare and the stag, till they had to hide where best they could and turn their tails to the wind. The little brown mice could hardly put their noses outside their door; and the sparrows sat rumped and disconsolate under the leafless bushes. But the crows rocked undaunted on the tallest twigs and held their beaks straight to the wind, so that it should not blow up under their feathers.

Sometimes, it snowed as well. But it was a stupid, sluggish snow, which melted the moment that it touched the ground.

At night, the wind hooted in the mountain-clefts and the owl

in the wood. The withered leaves ran round and rustled like ghosts. The boughs of the trees swayed sadly to and fro, to and fro.

And, whether it snowed or rained or only misted, whether it were day or night, the valley lay ever in a horrid sludge and just as many clouds hung lurking in the mountains. The withered blades of grass eddied hopelessly in the meadow. The waves flowed bleak and cold in the river.

Then, one night, it froze.

The slush on the ground hardened into a thin crust, which the stag stuck his hoof through, but the hare ran safely across it.

The hedgehog shivered in his dreams, the ivy-flowers faded, the puddles got ice upon them.

And, next morning early, a thin layer of snow fell over the land. The sun shone again, but far and cold; and the clouds drifted away.

The Prince of Winter sat on the mountains: an old man, with white hair and beard. His naked breast was shaggy, shaggy his legs and hands. He looked strong and wild, with cold stern eyes.

But he was not angry, as when Spring drove him from the valley and when Autumn did not go quickly enough. He looked out over the kingdom

calmly, for now he knew that it was his. And, when he found anything dead or empty or desolate, he plucked at his great white beard and gave a harsh and satisfied laugh.

But all that lived in the land was struck with terror when it looked into his cold eyes.

The trees shook in their thick bark and the bushes struck their branches together in consternation. The mouse became quite snow-blind, when she peeped outside the door; the stag looked mournfully over the white meadow:

“My muzzle can still break through the ice, when I drink,” he said. “I can still scrape the

snow to one side and find a tuft of grass. But, if things go on like this for another week, then it's all up with me."

The crows and the chaffinch and the sparrow and the tit had quite lost their voices. They thought of the other birds, who had departed in time, and knew not where to turn in their distress. At last, they set out in a row to carry their humble greeting to the new lord of the land:

"Here come your birds, O mightiest of all princes!" said the crow and stood and marked time in the white snow. "The others left the country as soon as you announced your coming, but we have remained to submit

us to your sway. Now be a gracious lord to us and grant us food."

"We bow before Your Highness!" said the chaffinch.

"We have so longed for you!" said the tit and put his head on one side.

And the sparrow said the same as the others, in a tone of deep respect.

But the Prince of Winter laughed at them disdainfully:

"Ha, you time-serving birds!" he said. "Now you fawn upon *me*. In Summer's time, you amused yourselves merrily; in Autumn's you ate yourselves stout and fat; and, as soon as

Spring strikes up, you will dance
to his piping like the others. I
hate you and your screaming
and squalling and the trees you
hop about in. You are all here
to defy me; and I shall do for
you if I can."

Then he rose in all his
strength:

"I have my own birds and now
you shall see them."

He clapped his hands and
sang:

Wee snow-birds, white snow-birds,
White snow-birds, wee snow-birds,

Through fields skim along!

To jubilant Spring I grudge music
of no birds,

To Summer no song.

Come, Winter's mute messengers,
swift birds and slow birds,

White snow-birds, wee snow-birds,

Till the valley be soft as down for
your nesting

Of numberless ice-eggs by frosty
rims spanned!

Now rushing, now resting,

White snow-birds, wee snow-birds,

Skim soft through the land!

And Winter's birds came.

Suddenly, it darkened and the
air became full of little black
specks, which descended and
turned into great white snow-
flakes. They fell over the
ground, more and more, in an
endless multitude; all white and
silent, they lay side by side and
layer upon layer. The carpet
over the land grew ever thicker.

The crows and the others took shelter in the forest, while the snow fell, and gazed dejectedly over the valley. There was now not a blade of grass, nor yet a stone to be seen: everything was smooth and soft and white. Only the trees stood out high in the air; and the river flowed through the meadow, black with anger.

“I know how to crush *you!*” said the Prince of Winter.

And, when evening came, he told the wind to go down. Then the waves became small and still, Winter stared at them with his cold eyes and the ice built its bridge from bank to bank. In vain the waves tried to hum Spring’s song. There

was no strength in their voices. In vain they called upon Summer's sun and Autumn's cool breezes. There was none that heard their complaint; and they had to submit to the yoke.

Next morning, there was nothing left of the river but a narrow channel; and, when one more night had passed, the bridge was finished. Again the Prince of Winter called for his white birds; and soon the carpet was drawn over the river, till it was no longer possible to see where land began and water ended.

But the trees strutted ever so boldly out of the deep snow; and the crows screamed in their tops.

The firs and pines had kept all their leaves and were so green that it was quite shocking to behold. Wherever they stood, they acted as a protection against the frost and a shelter against the snow; and the chaffinch and the other small birds found a hospitable refuge under their roofs.

The Prince of Winter looked at them angrily:

"If I could but cow you, if I could but break you!" he said. "You defy me and you irritate me. You stand in the midst of my kingdom keeping guard for Summer and you give shelter to the confounded screechers and screamers who disturb the peace

of my land. My ice cannot penetrate to your pith and kill you. If I had only snow enough to bury you, so that, at least, you did not offend my eyes!"

But the trees stood strong under Winter's wrath and waved their long branches:

"You have taken from us what you can," they said. "Farther than that your power does not go. We will wait calmly for better times."

When they had said this, Winter suddenly set eyes upon tiny little buds round about the twigs. He saw the walnut's spikes, that smacked of spring. He saw the little brown

mice trip out for a run in the snow and disappear again into their snug parlours before his eyes. He distinctly heard the hedgehog snoring in the hedge; and the crows kept on screaming in his ears. Through his own ice, he saw the noses of the frogs stick up from the bottom of the pond.

He was seized with frenzy:

“Do I dream or am I awake?” he shouted and tore at his beard with both hands. “Are they making a fool of me? Am I the master or not?”

He heard the anemones breathe peacefully and lightly in the mould, he heard thousands of grubs bore deep into the wood

of the trees as cheerfully and imperturbably as though Summer were in the land. He saw the bees crawl about in their busy hive and share the honey they had collected in summer and have a happy time. He saw the bat in the hollow tree, the worm deep down in the ground; and, wherever he turned, he saw millions of eggs and grubs and chrysalids, well guarded and waiting confidently for him to go away.

Then he leapt down into the valley and raised his clenched fists to heaven. His white hair and beard streamed in the wind, his lips trembled, his eyes glittered like ice.

He stamped on the ground
and sang in his loud, hoarse voice:

Roar forth, mine anger, roar and
rouse

What breathes below earth's
girder!

By thousands slay them—bird and
mouse,

And fish and frog and leaf and louse!
In deadly fog the valley souse!

Build me a royal pleasure-house
Of ice and snow, where storms ca-
rouse

With Death and Cold and Murder!

He shouted it over the land.

The ice broke and split into
long cracks. It sounded like
thunder from the bottom of the
river. It darkened, as when
Summer's thunder-storms used
to gather over the valley, but

worse still, for then you could perceive that it would all pass by, but now there was no hope to be seen.

Then the storm broke loose.

The gale roared so that you could hear the trees fall crashing in the forest. The ice was split in two and the huge floes heaped up into towering icebergs, while the water froze together again at once. The frost bit as deep into the ground as it could go and bit to death every living thing that it found in the mould. The snow fell and drifted over meadow and hill; sky and earth were blended into one.

This lasted for many days; and those were hard times.

The sparrows did not know at last if they were alive or dead; the crows crept into the pine-forest, silent with hunger and fear. The stag had not found a single tuft of grass for two days past and now leapt belling through the wood, tortured with starvation. The mice crept together in their parlours and froze; the chaffinch froze to death; the hare lay dead in the meadow; the fox ate the hare's remains and was very thankful to do so.

And, when the weather subsided at last, things were not a whit better.

It was more piercingly cold than ever. The snow lay all

around in huge drifts; and, where the snow had been blown away, the ground was hard as stone. Every single puddle was frozen to the bottom; the lake was frozen, the river was frozen; and the stag had to swallow snow to slake his thirst.

Want reigned on every side.

The hedgehog had shrunk until there was room for two in the hole which was once too small for him. The crows fought like mad, if they found as much as an old shrivelled berry forgotten in the bushes. The fox skulked about with an empty stomach and evil eyes. But the little brown mice discovered with dismay that they were nearly come

to the bottom of their store-room, for they had eaten very hard to keep warm in the bad days.

The Prince of Winter stood in the valley and looked upon all this with content. He went into the forest, where the snow was frozen to windward right up to the tops of the smooth beech-trunks; but on the boughs of the fir-trees it lay so thick that they were weighed right down to the ground.

“You may be Summer’s servants,” he said, scornfully, “but still you have to resign yourselves to wearing my livery. And now the sun shall shine on you; and I will have a glorious day after my own heart.”

He bade the sun come out; and he came.

He rode over a bright blue sky; and all that was still alive in the valley raised itself towards him and looked to him for warmth. There was a yearning and a sighing deep in the ground and deep in the forest and deep in the river:

“Call Spring back to the valley! Give us Summer again! We are yearning! We are yearning!”

But the sun had but a cold smile in answer to their prayers. He gleamed upon the hoar-frost, but could not melt it; he stared down at the snow, but could not thaw it.

The valley lay dead and silent under its white winding-sheet. Scarcely even the crows screamed in the forest.

"That's how I like to see the land," said Winter.

And the day came to an end, a short, sorry day, swallowed up helplessly in the great, stern night, in which a thousand stars shone cold over the earth. The snow creaked under the tread of the stag; the sparrow chirped with hunger in his sleep. The ice thundered and split into huge cracks.

The Prince of Winter sat on his mountain throne again and surveyed his kingdom and was glad. His great, cold eyes

stared, while he growled in his
beard:

Proud of speech and hard of hand,
A cruel lord to follow,
Winter locks up sea and land,
Blocks up every hollow.

Summer coaxes, sweet and bland,
Flowers in soft vigour;
At Winter's harsh and grim command,
They die of ruthless rigour.

Short and cold is Winter's day,
Long and worse night's hours;
Few birds languish in his pay
And yet fewer flowers.

The days wore on and Winter
reigned over the land.

The little brown mice had
eaten their last nut and were at
their wits' end as to the future.

The hedgehog was reduced to skin and bone; the crows were nearly giving in. The river lay dead under the ice.

Then suddenly there came the sound of singing:

Play up! Play soon!

Keep time! Keep tune!

Ye wavelets blue and tender!

Keep time! Keep tune!

Burst ice and rime

In equinoctial splendour!

Up leapt Winter and stared with his hand over his brows.

Down below in the valley stood the Prince of Spring, young and straight, in his green garb, with the lute slung over his shoulder. His long hair waved

in the wind, his face was soft and round, his mouth was ever smiling, his eyes were dreamy and moist.



**THE
SECOND MEETING**

CHAPTER VI



THE SECOND MEETING

*A thousand centuries ran as fast
As runs one day of gladness past
And how that is none knoweth.*

A HUNDRED thousand years passed, one like the other, and the day came when the princes were to meet again, as arranged, and to hear from one another how things had gone.

They went to the meeting-place in the darkness of the night and sat down separately where they had sat before, in a circle, each on his mountain.

When the sun rose, he shone upon the four great lords in all their might and splendour.

And Summer's purple cloak beamed and the golden belt round his loins and the rose in his belt. Spring sat in his green garb and plucked at the strings of his lute and hummed to it. Autumn's motley cloak flapped in the wind. The snow on Winter's mountain sparkled like diamonds.

Summer's eyes and Winter's met for the first time after many years. The sweat sprang to Winter's brow; Summer shivered and wrapped himself in his cloak. They were both equally strong and equally proud; the

eyes of the one were as gentle as the other's were cold and stern. They looked angrily at each other, bitter, irreconcilable enemies as before.

And Spring and Autumn sat just opposite each other, as on that day long since; and their eyes met like Winter's and Summer's, for they neither had seen each other during the years that passed. And Spring's glance was just as moist and dreamy and young and Autumn's just as sad and serious.

The princes sat like that for a while. Then they all rose and bowed low, but Spring and Autumn bowed lower than the others, as befits those who are

the lesser. And, when they were seated again, each on his mountain, Autumn turned his serious eyes to Summer and asked:

“Did I keep the covenant we made?”

“That you did,” said Summer. “You brought my produce home; I thank you for it.”

But Autumn turned to Winter and asked:

“And did I do what I promised you? Did I make your bed? Did I make room on the earth for your storms and your frost?”

“You did,” replied Winter, bluntly. “But you always left the valley too late.”

Spring raised his young face towards the Prince of Summer and asked:

“Did I spread your cloth as I promised? Did I release the water from the yoke of the ice, did I rid the earth of its frozen crust? Did I drape the green woods for your coming?”

“Yes, you did,” replied Summer, kindly. “And I owe you my thanks.”

But Winter shook his fist at green Spring and shouted:

“You always came too soon, you rascal! I never got my snows thoroughly emptied, my storms had never blown themselves out, before you were there with your hurdy-gurdy.”

"I did as I had to," replied Spring and smiled and plucked at the strings of his lute.

But the Prince of Autumn rose and made three deep bows:

"Then our meeting was fortunate for the poor earth," he said. "Now we can part, never to meet again, and go our way over the land until the end of the world."

The Prince of Spring rose and bowed three times, as Autumn had done, and bound the lute over his shoulder. But Summer and Winter remained sitting and looked out before them, as if they had more on their minds; and, when Spring and Autumn saw this, they sat

down again, each on his mountain, and waited respectfully.

And, when this had lasted some time, Winter raised his white head and looked from the one to the other. Then he said:

“Now I will say what we are all thinking.”

Autumn turned a questioning glance towards him; and Spring unfastened his lute again and played and hummed. But the Prince of Summer nodded in assent.

“We are princes by the grace of God,” said Winter. “We have shared the earth among us by turns, according to agreement, so that each of us reigned for a quarter of the year. We

have kept the covenant which we made with one another, but the land is no longer ours.”

“That is true,” said Summer.

“We are no longer lords in the land,” said Winter. “Men have seized upon the power.”

The Prince of Summer nodded once more; Autumn just bowed his head in assent; and Spring hummed his songs and looked out over the land as if he were not even listening. But Winter continued:

“I know not whence they came. I daresay they are some of that vermin which Spring lures up from the mould with his playing and which Summer keeps the life in. I do not know.

But this I do know, that they are there, swarming over the land and increasing year by year."

"That is true," said Summer.

The Prince of Autumn nodded his head, but Spring went on playing and humming.

"That is how the matter stands," said Winter. "And I cannot touch them. They are too clever for me and they become more clever each time I see them anew. In vain I send my most piercing colds, my mightiest storms against them. They have built houses in which they sit snug and safe and allow the storms to rage. They light fires to keep themselves warm and

have made themselves thick woollen clothes for their bodies and limbs, their hands and feet. And even *that* is not enough. The animals they have a use for they take into their houses; the bushes they want to protect they bind up in mats and straw. When I send my snow down over the earth, till it lies right up to the roofs of their houses, they shovel it away and make roads and paths right through it. When I bind the water with ice, they break the ice into pieces, if *that* suits them, or else they put iron under their feet and skate over the ice and derive a pleasure from it into the bargain."

“That is true,” said Summer.
“Men have seized upon the power.”

But the Prince of Winter was not yet done with his grievance:

“It is men that rule the earth,” he said. “And they know it and tease and hinder me everywhere. To show their thorough contempt for me, they have placed their greatest and most important festival in the very midst of my reign. So brazen are they that they simply beg me for ice and snow for their ‘Christmas’!”

“I know them too,” said the Prince of Autumn. “I cannot deny that they have made themselves lords of the earth, even though they do me no particular

harm. But they are self-willed and they bring the crops home sometimes earlier and sometimes later than is right."

"Just so!" shouted Winter. "That is why I cannot starve them to death, because they fill their barns in Autumn's time. If we kept together, we could crush them."

But now Summer raised his voice:

"Men have the power," he said, "and we can do nothing to prevent it. They have become too many for us and too clever, as Winter has said. In the beginning, I had nothing against them. They ran in the forest like my other creatures and

hunted and fought and bore their children under the foliage. They obeyed the law of life, as I had laid it down, and I granted that to them just as much as to the stag and the sparrow and the worm."

"The first time they saw me they wrapped themselves in skins and hid themselves in holes," said Winter, angrily.

"That was their right," replied Summer, calmly. "Every single being that I have created seeks protection against your wickedness, if he cannot fly the land during your reign. But men are no longer what they were. They no longer hunt freely and bravely in the wood.

Their colour has become pale, their arms weak, their hearts craven. For years at a time, their children are feeble and helpless. Men are wretched creatures that deserve to die; and I would not say a word against it if Winter killed them all. For they do not reign because they are the strongest, but because they have studied all the world's subtle contrivances and devices. That is what gives them their power upon earth."

"Let us extirpate them!" roared Winter.

"We cannot do that," replied the Prince of Summer. "They have adapted the earth entirely to suit their own needs. They

have exterminated some of my animals and plants, because these were of no use nor pleasure to them; others they have disseminated everywhere. And all that they take into their service become weak and sickly like unto themselves, tied to them and dependent upon them, so that they can yield them the advantages which they need, but are no longer allowed to lead the free life for which they were created. I hate men, as the Prince of Winter hates them. But there is no remedy against their might."

He ceased speaking. The three princes stared despondently before them. But Spring

plucked gaily at the strings of his lute.

Then Winter turned to him and said, roughly:

"You are the only one that has not spoken. What harm do men do you?"

"Tell us!" demanded Autumn.

"Do you hate them as we do?" asked Summer.

The Prince of Spring raised his young face and looked at them as though his thoughts were far away. Then he said: "Men? They cause me no pain."

"I think that is one of your green lies," sneered Winter.

But Spring looked away before him with his moist and

dreamy eyes, plucked harder at the strings and answered:

“See, when I come to the valley and touch the strings of my lute and sing to it and the flowers spring up from the mould: then the wailing relaxes in men’s hearts even as in the cold ground. Then they sing and flourish and thrive and laugh; and love is kindled in their thoughts; and their souls rejoice.”

The three looked at Spring in amazement, but he continued:

“There was an old, old man, when last I came to the valley. His hair was white and his eyes dim. His hands groped helplessly before him; and his legs could scarcely bear him. His

daughter died in Summer's passionate hours; his sons dropped dead while gathering Autumn's crops. His wife closed her eyes under your wrath, O mighty Winter! But, when I stood in the valley and plucked at the strings of my lute, suddenly he straightened his crooked back and his eyes recovered their fire: "The woods are turning green!" he said. And he went out and ran on his shaking legs after my flowers and listened to my song and joined with the others in my green gladness."

He ceased. Not one of the three princes answered him. Long they sat silent and looked out over the earth.

And evening fell and night.
The moon shone upon the snow-
clad mountain, Summer's roses
shed their scent, Autumn's mot-
ley cloak flapped in the wind,
Spring plucked at the strings of
his lute and hummed softly to its
music.

The next morning, the four
princes rose in their splendour
and their might, bowed low to
one another and strode slowly
away over the earth.

THE END

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